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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2008

In Today's Papers

EU Commissioner Visits Turkey amid Political Confusion
All papers report on Thursday, EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn will visit Turkey amid ongoing internal debates regarding the closure case against the AKP and delays in Turkey's EU harmonization reforms. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet and some mainstream papers speculate the AKP proposal to change articles 301 and 305 of the penal code prove the AKP is seeking closer ties to the EU. CHP deputy group chairmen Kemal Kilicdaroglu, Kemal Anadol and Hakki Suha Okay held a press conference at the parliament yesterday; they publicly warned Barroso that the Turkish constitution restricts public comments related to ongoing constitutional lawsuits. Liberal Radikal says Barroso is coming to Turkey in order to push for reforms, but the suit banning the AKP will also be raised during his meetings. Mainstream Milliyet, under the headline "EU Tensions in Ankara," says, "All eyes are turned to the EU officials' visit as the Ergenekon investigation and the suit for banning the AKP continue." In addition, Milliyet notes, "Barroso's comments will be closely followed by the opposition." Milliyet expects CHP Leader Deniz Baykal to criticize the EU for its double standard regarding Turkey's EU reforms, namely regarding EU support for Turkey's struggle against the PKK. Islamist-oriented Zaman writes, "The CHP Bets All of Its Cards on Article 301," and "the CHP has drawn attention to itself by preventing two important developments in Turkish-EU relations - revising articles 301 and 305 of the penal code. The CHP voted against the revision of 301 and 305, which were due to be on the parliamentary agenda during Barroso's visit." Zaman columnist Sahin Alpay argues the current crisis in Turkey is, "about the West's withdrawal of its support for the AKP, the AKP's efforts to seek compromise with the establishment, and its failure to maintain determination to complete the democratization process."

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says Barroso will meet Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I in Istanbul. In order to avoid controversy

over the 'Ecumenical' title of the Patriarch, the Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) asked Barroso to also meet the Mufti of Istanbul, says the paper.

Editorial Commentary on Turkey-EU Relations

Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet (4/10): "There is a need for the EU to be strong about both democracy and secularism. Both the President of the EU Commission Manuel Barroso and the EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn have made public statements against the closure of AKP, and I completely agree with them. Yet, I wish in their statement they emphasized secularism as much as they emphasized democracy. We should criticize anti-EU groups but at the same time we, including Barroso and Rehn, should also question the sincerity of AKP's pro-EU stance. Obviously, the ruling AKP has reignited its EU enthusiasm due to internal political developments. Both democracy and secularism have to be equally protected because they are indispensable in a modern and developed country. Things are not going well for either democracy or secularism in Turkey. While battling those who are against democracy, the EU should not appear as if they tolerate those who seek to dilute secularism."

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal (4/10): "EU Commission President Manuel Barroso's remarks prior to his trip to Ankara created some anxiety, especially among the opposition parties in parliament. Both MHP and CHP affirm the EU is not supposed to interfere with ongoing judicial matters. In addition, the EU is not supposed to take sides with a particular political party, i.e. the ruling AKP. Even within the AKP, there are some who are pleased with Barroso's remarks, and there are some who are worried by his remarks. The EU acts like an overseeing authority among its members and is likely to interfere with other domestic issues as well. The AKP may not be happy with the EU's meddling in the future, depending

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on which issues the EU targets. The gist of this issue is about understanding the way EU membership changes the course of the nation-state model. In that regard, all members of the EU accept and recognize the overseeing structure of the Union. This means the EU structure meddles in members' domestic affairs, particularly regarding freedoms, human rights, common democratic values and the separation of state and religion. Barroso has a difficult task. He now has to persuade both the ruling government and the opposition parties on these fundamental aspects of the European Union."

CHP Delays Discussion of Article 301 in Parliament
Islamist-oriented Zaman reports under the headline, "The CHP Blocks Parliament's Goodwill Gesture in Reforming Article 301" that, "acting Parliament Speaker Guldal Mumcu of the CHP did not submit article 301 changes to the parliament because she said the issue was "not very important," and that Speaker Koksal Toptan "could initiate the procedures when returns to Turkey from China." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak says, "Mumcu could have submitted the changes to parliament in honor of her husband Ugur Mumcu, a journalist who was assassinated in 1993." Mainstream Sabah writes, "Opposition parties CHP and MHP cooperate to block reforms in article 301, with CHP working to delay the reforms while the MHP threatens to apply to the Constitutional Court for scrapping them." Islamist-oriented Zaman says, "The AKP is also preparing an extensive package of democratization reforms which include affirmative action for women, children's rights, and environmental protection."

Poll: Closure Case Increases AKP Voters' EU Support
Milliyet and Radikal carry a survey conducted by A&G polling company for Turkey's prime-time television Kanal D, which shows 41.9 percent of AKP supporters say Turkey should join the EU. 27.7 percent oppose Turkey's EU accession while 24.0 percent say EU accession will not make a difference. Milliyet says support among the AKP voters for Turkey's EU membership increased following the launch of the closure case against the ruling party. AKP voters' support for Turkey's EU membership was 54.7 percent in 2005, this year it stands at 47.1 percent in April, which is up from 29.5 percent in January.

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet carries a survey conducted by

Political Research Company, according to which 85 percent believe AKP's headscarf policy caused tension in the country. 84.2 percent say people live their faith freely in Turkey. 67.9 percent think there's no headscarf problem in Turkey while 18.4 percent believe the opposite. 37.3 percent find the closure case against the AKP "right," whereas 49.2 percent find it "wrong." The survey canvassed the views of 2,470 adults in 20 provinces through one-on-one interviews from April 1-6.

Crocker: Turkish Operations Draw Iraqi Kurds Closer to Baghdad
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker testified yesterday at the U.S. Congress. He noted, "The Turkish ground offensive into northern Iraq made the Iraqi Kurds realize the importance of being a part of the Iraqi identity," and "this drew them closer to the Baghdad Administration." Liberal Radikal quotes Crocker as saying, "Both the Iraqi and Turkish governments are trying to strengthen ties; President Talabani paid a successful visit to Turkey in March."

Diyarbakir Delegation Gives President Gul Report on Southeast Turkey

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others report a delegation including representatives of NGOs from the mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir met with President Abdullah Gul on Wednesday. They submitted a report to the President, asking for affirmative action for the region including improvement of the regional infrastructure and support for border trade. The report notes it is important for Turkey to maintain good ties with neighboring countries. President Gul called for resolving the

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problems within the framework of democracy, saying everything could be discussed as long as violence and terror are shunned.

TV Highlights
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said "common sense will prevail" regarding the allegations that the EU could suspend accession talks with Turkey.

- Turkey's religious affairs directorate "Diyanet" says Alevi meeting places, called "Cemevi," should not be seen as a place of religious worship. Ali Bardakoglu, Diyanet Director of Religious Affairs, said, "All Muslims worship in mosques and Islam does not accept alternative places of worship."

- Turkey hosts a meeting of Foreign Ministers from Pacific countries.

International News

- Turkey will buy 80 anti-tank missiles and 800 other missiles from Russian company Rosoboronexport.

- Washington Institute's Turkey specialist Soner Cagaptay says U.S. support against the PKK will continue.

- Iraqi President Jalal Talabani said he backs efforts to disband the Mehdi Army of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

WILSON